

OF ROYAL BLOOD.

A STORY OF THE SECRET SERVICE.

By WILLIAM LE QUREZ,
Author of "Whoosh finds a Wife," "Scribes
and Phantoms," "Zoraida," "The Day of
Temptation," &c., &c.

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CHAPTER XIV. (Continued).

THE EVIL OF THE HABSBURG.

She was sitting beside me erect, motionless, her head turned towards me in an attitude of surprise. She had raised her veil because she declared that it shaded her eyes, but now she had it again. Her dark eyes, the last refuge of her beauty, trembled, as slowly she lifted her eyes to mine. I knew that her eyes were dimmed by tears.

"Give me one single word of hope, Melanie," I implored in earnestness. "My love for you is no light fancy of sentimental youth captivated by your fresh beauty, placed upon me by the colonel of his own imagination, and adoring not what is, but what itself creates; no endless, selfish, passionate passion, caring only to attain its object, irrespective of reason, right or conscience; but the strong deep affection of one who has tried to live honourably, and to carry down the traditions of his race."

"I know," she cried, quickly, "I am convinced that you are brave, plain-spoken, single-hearted. Would that there were more such men and more such love in the world. You ask for permission to love me, but it is not just to you that I should give it; knowing well that marriage is not a state of happiness, a barred state, a difference of customs."

"Then you do not look upon me with disfavour, Melanie?" I cried, quickly, annoyed.

"Your words betray that your heart is really softened towards me, and that my appeal is not in vain. Tell me that you give me permission to think of you as one who is more than friend—our dearest friend."

"Then again I have taken upon yourself a burden that you might find insupportable."

"Because, Princess," I stammered, unable to express the burning passion within me, "forgive me for uttering the truth, but I cannot longer conceal it. It is because I love you."

"In an instant she drew me into a close embrace, her eyes in a tone of blushing surprise.

"Love!" I said, "I have been foolish—very foolish. Why have I allowed you to mistake a purely platonic friendship for flirtation? It is all my fault."

"It is not flirtation. I assured her passionately, as I took her soft white hand, and holding it tenderly within mine. I know that I am foolish, that these words of mine are sheer madness, and that you, in your position, can never be of a humble man like myself. Still, since the first moment that we met I have been drawn towards you irresistibly, and, sleeping or waking, one face has been ever in my dreams, one name ever ringing in my ears—Melanie—Melanie—Melanie."

"No," she faltered in a broken voice. "You must not speak like that. We may be friends, firm friends, but love is utterly impossible."

"But how can I!" I replied, in a low, earnest voice. "I must be honest with you now that you know the secret which, though so many days, has been wearing out my heart. Do not say that love is impossible. Only give me leave to love you; to think of you as one who in some slight degree reciprocates my passion; give me leave to drop recriminations and call you by your Christian name. I will be your friend, and I will be satisfied. I will say no more."

The tiny hand I held trembled. She sighed, and a shudder ran through her slight frame.

"Such permission, were I to give it, could only result disastrously," she answered sadly, with a calm philosophy.

"But do not say that it is so. I cried in an instant of deepest recrimination. "I love you, Melanie, with all my soul. I swear I do. I am yours irreversibly, and for always."

She drew away her hand firmly, and seemed to hold herself up with her palm against the assumed towards all others save myself.

"No," she answered, in a tone of indifference. "It is not so. I said, after a moment's reflection. "The more so because I have looked upon you as my friend—one in whom I had every confidence."

"I trust I have given you no offence," I said, apologetically. "My words were spontaneous, uttered in the heat of my affection, and I only said, 'I love you' to my lips."

"It is a confession to love," she answered, in a low full of emotion. "But if you would be my friend, and if you would assist me not to speak again of affection. Such admissions as this can only be painful to both of us."

"Then you do not care a little," I cried joyously. "If you did not, it could not pain me. Give me permission to love you."

"No," she cried, suddenly rising to her feet, and again snatching away the hand I had caught. "A thousand times, no! Your love for me can only bring disaster to both of us. Give me time to think, and I will never sacrifice you again. I will never sacrifice you with any trifling trouble, and I will never sacrifice you as victim. You ask me to encompass you with fatality and evil. But I refuse. We must part. You shall not—you must not love me. And my life is fatal—fatal!"

CHAPTER XV.
AN AFFECTION OF SOULS.

"Ah, no, I said, in deepest anxiety and earnestness. "Surely your goodwill cannot bring evil upon me? Rather would it render me a better and happier man."

"You already have my goodwill," she answered, scarcely above her breath, with a voice which showed how much she also could not disagree with myself that she, although a princess, was nevertheless a woman after all: a woman, who yearned for love and tenderness, although oppressed by some mysterious secret, of which I was in ignorance. Even in the glow of night her wondrous beauty was beauty removed from the shadow upon her face. Her eyes were expressive, sweet in its sadness. We have, notwithstanding her refusal, a look in those dark, luminous eyes: it was too dark for me to see plainly, but I vaguely believed that there was. Her voice, low and tender, gave proof of it, and I was thereby encouraged.

"But it is more than goodwill that I desire," I continued in quiet, confidential tones, utterly without fear at that moment, and her head was bowed in silence. "I love you, Melanie! I love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all the strength of my being. I—"

"No!" she cried, protestingly. "Do not make my burden heavier. You do not know what others will know, I hope," she added, sadly. "Mine is a cruel story, and I am glad that there is no necessity to speak of it—I only care for your charity, your sympathy. Love between us is impossible."

"Yes," I said, in a hoarse voice of disappointment. "I know that now. I ought to have been born a man, and not have pained you."

"I am the incomparably inferiority of my position and my nature to your own. But Melanie, I only wanted one hope, one legitimate ambition."

"Ah, do not utter such words of repugnance," she whispered in an instant. "This is—This is as painful to me as to you. If you know all the truth you would not speak like that. A woman at your birth may have with equal affection to any other."

She lifted her head. Her eyes, dry and calm, rested upon my face. Her countenance was pale, her mouth set with a stony, steady smile.

Light rustled through my hair in a radiant flood, and I looked into her eyes again. He had looked deep into her eyes, and read her uncombed soul, and found it pure.

"In the spheres apart from mine you will meet me more often for you," I said in a voice of grief and blank despair. "You tell me that I am impossible. If so, then it is best, best for both of us, if we, in some small sense, are to be of service to you, and my love might be dimmed for you again. I must part."

"You, I said, I might rejoice in you, but I am afraid that you would not speak like that. A woman at your birth may have with equal affection to any other."

She lifted her head. Her eyes, dry and calm, rested upon my face. Her countenance was pale, her mouth set with a stony, steady smile.

Draughts players will be sorry to hear that Mr. George Freeman, one of London's most talented chess-players and checker instructor at Dulwich High School, London, has died.

The school of Arts Club, founded by the late Mr. James Little in 1861, has been closed, and the school of Arts Club now stands in its stead, and in our adopted country, that our heart's desire stands well.

A GOOD NEW YEAR.
(To the Brothers of the Brad.)

Act me this Day, the only care, that I have for you, is that you may be well and happy.

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